

Ric Williamson Memorial Ceremony (Speech – Office of the Governor)

** Note: Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.*

Thursday, January 03, 2008 • Speech

Ric Williamson was a statesman, a businessman and possibly the boldest visionary our state has ever known. With him, I was always reminded of my favorite Jonathan Swift quote: "When a genius comes into this world, he will be known by this sign: the dunces will all be in confederacy against him."

Ric Williamson was, above all things, a friend that we could trust him to shoot us straight, no matter what the circumstance. He would take our calls, no matter the time. Without hesitating, Ric would cover your back, take up your slack, and hump your pack. In our short lives on this slowly spinning globe, we might accumulate material wealth, we might win the acclaim of the voting public, we might even bring about social change. But, we are most blessed by our relationships, anchored by people who are steadfast, trustworthy and true. Ric Williamson was all of those things for me, for so many other people here today and for a host of individuals who cannot be in this auditorium.

Ric Williamson was like a brother, not unlike brotherhoods forged on the field of battle, and I am a better man for having had that relationship. When I first met Ric, my experience was kinda like having a near-miss with a tornado. He was more like a force of nature. He had a sharp wit, a wicked sense of humor, and eyes that I'm sure could pierce into one's soul. Ric and I arrived together at the Capitol in Austin as freshmen legislators. Somehow we ended being roommates. And let me tell you living with Ric Williamson was like nothing I have ever experienced. While Cliff and I wanted to kick back, have a cold one, and watch the game with Toomey, Dr. Mike, Ron or the other Pit Bulls, Ric pulled out his flip chart and held class on the way things OUGHT to be. He would challenge us, tease us, and sometimes just plain lecture us. At the end of the typical exhausting evening we would hit the sack, our ears ringing from one of his lessons. It could have been anything from the proper structure of government accounting processes, to how men shouldn't wear their ties short because it makes them look like clowns. And, as Cliff shared, if we got up in the middle of night, we would often see the glowing ember of a cigarette coming from Ric's room as he worked out the solutions to some far off challenge.

In an age where expensive opinion research came into vogue, Ric created his own low-tech polling approach. He'd just drive to the nearest WalMart and engage shoppers in conversation. He knew that the average WalMart customer was the best indication of what Texans thought, needed and would do. His results were remarkably accurate. Ric also famously maintained the highest level of integrity. He consistently refused to allow anyone to buy him a meal, believing that it would make them think a quid pro quo was in effect, a burden he preferred not to bear. Talk about setting the Austin lobby on its ear.

Those of us who knew him well knew that Ric's unfiltered and genuine emotions, combined with his unbounded intellect and probing curiosity, made every conversation a thrill ride of possibility. He didn't just think outside the box, he questioned whether there should even be a box. And could he ever convince people to do things. One on one, he was the most persuasive person I have ever known!! How many of us in this room did he convince to do something we wouldn't otherwise have done? For goodness sakes, he convinced me to run for Lt. Governor!

One of my favorite examples of this is his son in law, Randy Meyer. Randy had a good job on the fast track with a reputable company in Houston. Somehow Ric convinced him to bring Melissa to Weatherford and go to work for him. Randy traded in his laptop for a pipe wrench and started working dawn 'til dusk in the oil and gas fields. When you can persuade someone to go to work for their father-in-law, that is one persuasive person.

Ric was a believer. He believed in service. He believed in private sector ingenuity. He believed the better angels of his fellow man would ultimately rise above the dark demons of division, and he believed in God. One can say that

only those who have experienced the dark confines of hell can truly appreciate the airy warmth of heaven. Ric fought his demons, and because of it, he learned to appreciate angels. And his angels were most definitely his wife and daughters. This larger-than-life man had a remarkable tenderness when it came to his family. And his passion for action showed at home, like when he discovered his daughters' interest in softball. Most dads would have considered their responsibility met by simply attending games. Ric, on the other hand, learned everything he could about softball, built them an indoor batting cage, became a huge booster of the sport, and an accomplished coach.

Let me share with you a story he really hated me retelling, the story of when he killed his very first deer. Or, more accurately, when I killed his very first deer. We were hunting in East Texas when Ric drew a bead on a nice buck and squeezed off one shot, then another, and the deer still didn't go down. Faced with letting Ric's wounded deer run off to suffer in the brush, I did the humane thing and finished it off with a quick and lethal shot. Ric and I always argued over who got credit for that deer. It was the only argument with him I think I ever won. And we did our share of arguing.

Great men and women share a common quality. Not perfection—in fact, they are often flawed. Instead, they don't let the fear of failure keep them from living life to the fullest. By this definition, Ric was a great, great man. He did not assign himself the fate of those timid souls who greet each sunrise wondering if they will achieve anything of consequence. He knew he had that power, granted to him by the grace of God, and he acted upon it. Ric firmly believed that every one of us is born with two gifts from God: time and God's grace. In my mind, this explains Ric more than anything. Those who know him were well aware he didn't waste one minute of time. Matter of fact, I think he thought it was a sin to waste time. He somehow managed to squeeze 100 years of living into 55 years 11 months and one day, all while making the person he was talking to at the moment feel like his main focus. And as for God's grace, Ric knew and trusted in it so well that he wasn't afraid to fail. And now, our God has received this man, this Texan, this friend, this father, this husband, into His loving arms of grace. He is as alive today as if he were here smiling, drawing on that ever present pipe or drawing on that darned flip chart. Ric is alive for me, because my faith allows me that great truth and because he was my friend. He believed in me, he told me the truth and he stuck with me in all the fights. I'll miss him more than I can tell you, but, like all of us in this room, I am a better person for having known him.

Mary Ann, Melissa, Katy, and Sara, we love you and are here for you in this time of mourning. As Ric stood by us, we stand by you, no matter what. Ric, we bid you farewell and we release you into